

The Importance of People

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LEARNING NEW WAYS

AMBROSE JARED, a young, normally exuberant administrator, who had entered upon his first elementary school principalship with some big ideas about democracy and the importance of treating teachers like human beings, is taking his hair down to his friend and counselor, STEWART KING, a high school guidance director. Mr. King has been around teachers for a long time and, for the most part, he listens patiently.

MR. JARED: It doesn't seem to work. I think I've tried everything. Those teachers don't want democracy. They want me to make all of the decisions so they can laugh, courteously, at the bad ones! I'm tempted to start giving some orders.

MR. KING: What are some of the things you've done?

MR. JARED: At the very first staff meeting I announced that I wanted to be democratic and that I felt a school would be a much better one if everyone pitched in and worked cooperatively. I made a regular speech on the subject.

MR. KING: What was their reaction?

MR. JARED: None that I could notice. Nobody seemed very interested, although they were pleasant enough personally. Everything just went on as it had in the past.

MR. KING: How had things gone on in the past?

MR. JARED: Well, old Mr. Brill had been principal for seventeen years before me, and he had had things pretty well routinized. Everything cleared through him. The teachers were friendly to one another, at least I thought so, but they didn't discuss professional matters with one another at all. They went straight to the principal with everything.

MR. KING: Maybe they didn't know what you were talking about when you said you wanted to be democratic. I'd guess that Mr. Brill boasted about being democratic, too. Almost every administrator does.

MR. JARED: Of course he did. But he wasn't. I don't think he knew what the word meant. He was so paternalistic that the whole school rotated around him. Whatever he blessed, went on. When he didn't speak to a teacher in the hall, she went right to the rest-room and cried. She knew she'd been bad.

MR. KING: Maybe that's what the teachers wanted. He probably took good care of them. Sent flowers when they were sick and loaned them money in the pinches without their asking for it.

- MR. JARED: Say, did you *know* him? That's exactly what he did do, and they loved it.
- MR. KING: How do you know they did? Most of them had been in that school for years and the only method they knew was Brill's method. Naturally, then, they adapted themselves to the circumstances. Those who couldn't, left. Do they still come to you for everything?
- MR. JARED: Do they! It drives me crazy. If I've said once I've said a thousand times "Have you talked this over with Miss Smith or Miss Colby?" They never have. I'm expected to settle everything. Each wants me on her side.
- MR. KING: Well, if they have worked that way for seventeen years, what do you expect? After all, it takes time and help to acquire new habits. You should remember more of your psychology. You've only been principal for six months.
- MR. JARED: I know. I get impatient. But I want their work to have dignity. I want them to be self-respecting and resourceful. That's why I'm trying to be democratic.
- MR. KING: Yes, I can see. But they probably are dignified and self-respecting and resourceful already. Those I've met are certainly dignified. Aren't they resourceful, too, presenting their side of the argument to you?
- MR. JARED: Yes, but their resourcefulness is used for a bad purpose.
- MR. KING: I don't know. That's the way they've had to get things in the past, not only for themselves but for the children. Maybe they don't know any other way to operate.
- MR. JARED: I *tell* them every day to talk things over with one another and arrive at some common understanding. They certainly can do that.
- MR. KING: You wouldn't want them to follow your orders, would you? But, seriously, have you taken time to talk over your concept of democratic administration with the teachers so that everyone has a common understanding of the problems involved?
- MR. JARED: No. Mature teachers should know what is meant when I say that schools should operate democratically. They just don't want to accept responsibility.
- MR. KING: Do they neglect their work? Are they irresponsible there?
- MR. JARED: No, they don't and they aren't. They are very conscientious. Maybe it isn't that they won't accept responsibility in general, but they certainly drag their feet when I suggest that we tackle cooperatively some all-school problem.
- MR. KING: Such as?
- MR. JARED: Well, to be specific, at our October staff meeting I suggested we work as a group on improving the behavior of the children in the corridors. The situation had gotten out of hand.
- MR. KING: You suggested that. Had anyone else brought the matter up?
- MR. JARED: No, but if you had eyes and ears you couldn't help but notice the bedlam.

MR. KING: And how was your suggestion received? Was anyone interested?

MR. JARED: No. They just sat. Later on Miss Williams, she's the elderly eighth grade teacher who has sort of kept me posted, reported that the teachers felt this was an administrative problem. Mr. Brill had never asked them for help in keeping the children quiet in the halls.

MR. KING: Maybe she was right—he hadn't.

MR. JARED: Of course, she was right. But that's my point. They should see that the way children behave in the corridors is an all-school problem—one in which everyone should be interested and on which everyone should work.

MR. KING: Have you always thought that?

MR. JARED: No, I guess not. I'm afraid I was just like all of these women when I started teaching in 1938. I kept things going in my room and that was all.

MR. KING: Where did you get these notions about everyone working cooperatively on all-school problems?

MR. JARED: I'm not sure. I guess I got the first inkling in the summer of '39 at a conference of supervisors in East St. Louis. Someone gave a speech and Carter and I hashed it over almost all night. I thought the speaker was crazy then. If I were to hear the speech now I'd probably think it was perfect.

MR. KING: So you've changed?

MR. JARED: Have I! During my first two years at Beetle I thought Mr. Crocken was perfect. He told us everything to do. I don't know when I've felt so secure and well cared for.

MR. KING: Then what?

MR. JARED: In the summer of '40 I attended the Workshop and I had a terrible time. We sat around and talked things over—you know. Tile was directing it that summer and he refused to get things going but waited until each student came to some conclusions and got under way on his own. I was so frustrated I thought I'd burst! I'd been used to having a teacher or principal tell me what to do and I didn't know how to go about tackling my own problems and studying them independently or with other people in the Workshop.

MR. KING: Did you learn how that summer?

MR. JARED: No. That summer upset me a lot. I thought about what happened the whole following year and went back to Chicago the next summer to test myself. I did better. I learned something about how to go on my own but I had a lot of difficulty working with the other people who had interests in my area.

MR. KING: What sort of trouble?

MR. JARED: Oh, we couldn't communicate too well. Everyone had his own notions and we didn't know how to bring agreements out or to identify the real sources of difficulty. We just hadn't learned how to operate as a group.

MR. KING: Did you learn how that summer?

MR. JARED: No, but we made some progress. The following year some of us upper grade teachers in the Ran School got together to work on a social studies curriculum. Things went along all right for a time but pretty soon we bogged

down. Miss Law, the social studies supervisor, saved us. She wrote the report and we all signed it. I thought at the time—some democracy!

MR. KING: There's a lot to learn, isn't there?

MR. JARED: There sure is. It's a slow process—or at least it was with me. I still talk a much better game than I play.

MR. KING: Don't be discouraged. You've only been working on these ideas for five or six years. They are important and their implications are tremendous. How long have you been principal at Greenwood now?

MR. JARED: Ummmmm. I get it. Here I've been bawling out those nice teachers of mine to you for being unable to catch on to ideas in six months that I haven't worked out myself in six years. What's the matter with me? I'd hate to think what Freud would say.

MR. KING: You're okay. There's a lot to learn, though. You'll have to teach yourself that lesson over and over again if you're anything like me. About the only thing I remember from my third-year Latin is *Natura non saltum facit*.

Tips for Teachers

A young teacher from California attracted considerable attention some time ago when she revealed that she had made at least one positive contact with each home represented in her classes before the first card marking. "Junior is showing keen interest in arithmetic," "May always comes to class neat and clean," "Bob is pleasantly polite," "Sally is a good reader"—always a comment to elicit pride within the home and incidentally pride within the pupil.

The first goal of salesmanship had been achieved by this teacher. A phone call, a brief note, a casual meeting on the street, or a visit to the home—the

total job may require "over-time" but the foundation is secured, respect and admiration are gained, and the first impression of the teacher is positive. If later it becomes necessary to contact the home regarding poor marks or discipline or any of the common "off-side" plays of youth, it is an easier task and the gate is opened by a friendly hand. First impressions—so easy to make and so very, very valuable in times of need—do an indeterminable amount of good in establishing friendly relations between the school and the public.—*The Wisconsin Journal of Education*, November, 1943.

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